English language and culture stereotypes in the eighteenth century: the first grammars of English for Italian learners

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1. Introduction

It is well-known that Anglo-Italian relations came to a head during the eighteenth century, as England began to be looked at as a model for its progress in the fields of politics, science and commerce. All this resulted in the cultural phenomenon defined as Anglomania, a generalised attitude of admiration for and imitation of all things English (Graf 1911).

This trend overturning does not only emerge from the fact that it was increasingly easier to establish interlinguistic and intercultural contacts between the two nations[1], but also from the beginning of a specific production of grammars by Italian authors who, by reworking texts of both the Anglo-French and Anglo-Italian traditions in England, published six handbooks of English – Pleunus (1701), Altieri (1728), Baretti (1760/1762), Barker (1766), Dalmazzoni (1788), and Baselli (1795) – expressly targeted for the Italian students of the English language[2] and designed to satisfy their demands, be these commercial, linguistic, cultural or intellectual (Frank 1983 and Vicentini 2006, forthcoming).

Moreover, not only do these grammar books bear witness to the initial development of the grammaticographic tradition of English in

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[1] Proofs thereof are the numerous translations into Italian, travels and long stays of Italians in England (cfr. Calcaterra 1926, Crinò 1957; Rossi 1970, 1991; Graziano 1984). References to the books reviewed or collected in Italy can be found in Rhodes (1964), Melchionda (1970) and Petrucci (1973).

[2] Before the publication of this set of grammars, Italian learners of English could rely only on plurilinguistic handbooks, such as Smith (1674) and Colsoni (1688).

Italy and of its main sources, but they also reveal stereotypes and specific topoi of the English language and culture seen from an Italian perspective, thus proving to be particularly suitable for shedding new light on some aspects of Anglo-Italian relations that continue to capture our imagination.

This paper will look at the way grammarians describe the English language and culture in the six books making up the corpus of this study[3], with a particular view to analysing the ideological and stereotyped images unravelling through the texts. This will be carried out by examining the handbooks' single grammar sections (e.g. phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon) and paratextual material (preface, introduction, etc.), which is usually thought to reveal possible biassed standpoints. The investigation will mainly rely on analytical tools derived from the History of the English Language, Contrastive, Comparative and Textual Linguistics.

1.1 Corpus and authors

In order to place the grammars that will be analysed later in their context, and thus emphasize their peculiarities, a few very general observations about their characteristics, sources and authors are worth reporting here. Firstly, the authors of the texts were all Italian teachers of English who had been living in England for some time (with the exception of Barker, an Englishman who emigrated to Italy in his youth). In particular, Pleunus, Altieri and Baretti were teachers of more than one language[4], as well as compilers of texts designed to teach Italian (thus continuing, in some way, the seventeenth-century polyglot tradition); Barker, Dalmazzoni and Baselli were, on the contrary, specialists of the English language only[5]. Furthermore, two out of the

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[3] The six texts collected for analysis are the first grammars of English for Italian students according to Alston (1974) and Graziano (1984).

[4] Pleunus styled himself a "Master of the Latin, French, Italian, German, an [sic] English Tongue" (Pleunus 1701: title-page); Altieri a "Professor of the Italian Tongue in London" (Altieri 1728: title-page); Baretti, renowned as the champion of the Italian language and culture in eighteenth-century England, mastered and taught, aside English and Italian, also Spanish and French.

[5] Such clear-cut division into two groups, respectively more or less related to the first and the second part of the eighteenth century, coincides with a discernible trend inversion in the history of Anglo-Italian relations as mentioned in § 1.

six grammaticographers were prelates (Father Barker and Abbot Baselli), which testifies to the link between culture, education and the Church in the history of foreign language teaching/learning (cf. Brizzi 1976).

Secondly, though the six grammar books often differ in their structures, they include almost the same sections, comprising one on pronunciation – where there is an attempt to describe the phonology of English in a form suitable to the Italian readership – and one focused on morphology and syntax – in which the treatment of the grammatical structure of English is largely traditional; all these books also contain such supplementary material as English dialogues, lists of familiar phrases, proverbs, idiomatic expressions, and glossaries, in order to help Italian learners to practise the foreign language.

Thirdly and lastly, a close textual and linguistic analysis (cf. Vicentini forthcoming) has allowed to reconstruct the cultural background the texts were designed and compiled in and to detect their readership's typology. Thus it emerges that Pleunus's and Altieri's addressees were tradesmen and merchants who needed English for practical aims; Baretti intended to provide his students with some basic phonetic and grammatical notions in order to be ready to go to London on business or intellectual interests. Barker and Dalmazzoni targeted their manuals to the learned and enlightened Tuscan and Roman bourgeois desirous to keep itself abreast of the cultural fashions of the day by reading books produced by a civilisation then admired all over Europe. As a consequence, their handbooks display a more formal and theoretical-minded approach, and their readers are not expected to move to England, but to appreciate excerpts from English literary masterpieces with the help of language teachers. Coming as it does at the end of the century, Baselli's grammar reveals a change in the cultural climate, since it participates in the general desire for renewal in the fields of pedagogy and teaching methodology (including foreign language teaching), which were to develop in the following century (cf. Howatt 1984: 130).

1.2 Sources

Recent research has revealed that Pleunus's (1701) and Altieri's

(1728) sources can be traced back to seventeenth-century Anglo-French grammars[6], which should not surprise, since it seems perfectly legitimate to suppose that – grammars being a genre apart – it was easier to make a grammar of English for French students into one for Italian students rather than adapt English grammars for a native audience. It is indeed to be considered that linguistic data and methodology in a grammar for foreigners differ from those in a grammar for native students; moreover, French being a Romance language like Italian, its grammaticographic model was very serviceable.

As a consequence, the grammars of English published in France exerted a far-reaching influence on the corresponding Italian tradition, since not only did Pleunus and Altieri directly excerpt most material from these texts, but also the following authors – except for Baretti – reworked most of the material derived from Pleunus and Altieri, thus still indirectly revising the same French sources and integrating them into their own texts. Baretti (1760), instead, stands apart from this tradition, as his handbook is overtly based on Samuel Johnson's Grammar prefaced to his Dictionary (1755)[7]. This fact adds a new interesting element to the history of Italian grammars of the English language and their sources: it does not only stress Baretti's unique position in this history, but it also implies that his work benefited considerably from the English grammaticographic tradition, i.e. Johnson's Grammar itself as well as its sources, thus making up a complex and manifold scenario[8].

[6] In particular, Pleunus (1701)'s sources were Mauger (1683), Miège (1685), Mauger and Festeau (1696), Boyer (1694), and Torriano (1659). As far as Altieri (1728) is concerned, some of Pleunus's sources are deemed to be his grammar's as well: especially Mauger and Festeau (1696) and Boyer (1694), besides some insertions excerpted from Veneroni (1714). For more specific details on the development of the Anglo-French grammaticographic tradition in England, see Howatt (1984: 52-60).

[7] "That of Mr. Samuel Johnson prefixed to his English Dictionary [was] my guide" (Baretti 1760: Preface).

[8] In fact, Ben Jonson's *English Grammar* (1640) and John Wallis's *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae* (1653) "are the grammarians on whom Johnson most often relies" (Kolb and DeMaria (eds) 2005: xl). Wallis's book, in particular, was written in Latin and addressed to foreign learners of English in order to satisfy the growing demand for English in Europe, among scholars and intellectuals attracted by the new ideas in theology and philosophy that were growing out of such thinkers as Francis

2. Analysis

It is firstly and foremost to be noted that the authors' perspective when describing the grammatical structures of English is Italian-centred; they never side with the English party, on the contrary they use such statements as "gli inglesi dicono, gli inglesi pronunciano" or "essi dicono", and they always write in Italian. This should be seen as a comprehensible attitude as far as five out of the six authors are concerned; these are indeed Italian, thus straightforwardly tending to maintain their national identity and therefore viewpoint. However, it is quite unexpected to come across the same statements in Barker, the only English grammaticographer, which reveals how the genre was stereotyped and once again confirms that the authors copied and plagiarised from previous works by revising the same sources (and often within the same grammaticographic tradition, which therefore proves to be a close one), though presenting their work as new, original and perfect. Such practice constitutes a recurrent cliché, which allows the compilers to promote their texts: they first shed negative light on their predecessors, carefully demolishing their works, and then describe their own manuals as more complete, precise and innovative. This frequent rhetorical pattern is also evidence of the presence of a hostile, highly competitive climate within the eighteenth-century teaching sector. Further stereotypes and recurrent commonplaces, however, can be found within the handbooks' proper grammatical and linguistic sections.

Bacon. It was an innovative text owing to its extremely clear pedagogical objectives and its focus on those features of English which were quite likely to strike foreign learners as being especially distinctive of English, i.e. not to be found in either Latin or other modern languages. Wallis's fresh attitude to the grammatical description of English, though at least partly counterbalanced by the more traditional, Latinizing approach of Ben Jonson's book (see Kolb and DeMaria (eds) 2005: xl-xlii), represented, with the suitable additions of dialectal variation and stylistic considerations, an ad-hoc foundation for Dr. Johnson's text and, even more so, for Baretti's – which indirectly (but consciously, as he mentioned Wallis in his own Grammar) reworked parts of the *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae*. More information on the above and related subjects in Fleeman (1964), Partridge (1969) and Howatt (1984: 94-100).

2.1 Stereotypes and topoi

2.1.1 English language, culture and the learning process

In general, the attitude towards the English language and culture is positive. By learning English, the Italian learner will be allowed to achieve a privileged position, and will be able to finally enter "il glorioso templio della lingua Britannica […]" (Baretti 1760: 31), where he will have the pleasure to enjoy Shakespeare's works: "e il piacere che l'ardito Italiano trarrà dalla lettura di Shakespeare solo, ampiamente lo rifarà della virtuosa e bene spesa fatica". Through the grammars' preface and introduction, numerous and diverse praises of the English government, art, literature and science unravel, a strategy employed to stress the importance of studying English. A few examples will suffice to make this clear:

> per rilevare i pregj, e l'importanza della Britannica favella, fa d'uopo riflettere, qual popolo sia quello, presso a cui ebbe già il suo nascimento, e presso a cui vive tuttora. Questi è un popolo numerosissimo […], un popolo commerciante, che solca animoso colle sue navi i Mari tutti, rendendo quasi comunicanti fra loro i lidi più remoti, un Popolo ricco, e possente, che ha moltissima influenza negli affari d'Europa, e nel sistema generale de' Regni […] (Barker 1766: xii-xiii);

> Inoltre questi Isolani son di presente, e furon anche ne' Secoli scorsi rinomati per la eccellente forma del loro Governo, per le loro severe virtù […]; Chiari, e famosi eglino sono per la profondità nelle Scienze, per la coltura di tutta la erudizione, per la eccellenza delle Arti […]. Or da queste prerogative facil cosa è argomentare qual debba essere la importanza, e la utilità del loro linguaggio, avendo ognor dimostrato la esperienza, che i pregi più belli delle lingue son di ordinario in proporzione di vantaggi sì fatti […]. Ed in fatti quant'Opere eccellenti, e quante utili invenzioni son venute alla luce in varj tempi entro quell'Isola fortunata? Basta rammentare i nomi di Bacone, di Newton, e di Locke […]. Mirabil cosa è come la Poesia Inglese accoppj in se stessa, e robustezza, e vaghezza, e nobiltà; Milton, Shakespeare, Dryden, hanno innalzato questa Facoltà più assai di quello, che generalmente da noi Italiani si pensa. Nobilissimi acquisti ha fatto la Repubblica Letteraria mercé le ingegnose fatiche di Addison, di Pope, di Chambers, e ai giorni nostri di Johnson, e di Warburton (Barker 1766: xiii-xv).

The main strengths highlighted by the authors by way of a captatio benevolentiae lead to the conclusion that one cannot help studying this language, be it for commerce, therefore for a functional scope, or pleasure:

> Dovremmo adesso ragionar del merito de' libri Inglesi, che trattano di Commercio, e di cose attinenti ad esso, con mostrare anche la loro lingua doviziosa in questo genere, tanto più che la nostra Italia, sia detto con pace, penuria pur troppo di somiglianti libri […]. Sappiasi in fine, che poca speranza resta a coloro che non intendono gli Originali Inglesi, di poter gustare tali Opere tradotte in altri linguaggi […] perché in primo luogo poche versioni ne abbiamo in lingua Italiana […] che sono per la maggior parte traduzioni, e finalmente perché è difficile assai il rendere in un'altra lingua i sentimenti, e i pensieri di Originali sì fatti coll'istessa forza, e precisione, come si converrebbe far nelle buone traduzioni (Barker 1766: xvi).

2.1.2 English pronunciation

Many recurrent topoi emerge in the pronunciation section, which is present in all the texts analysed and constitutes their most original part; indeed, here the grammarians attempt to describe the phonology of English in a form suitable for the Italian readership. Beside the model of language put forth, one can look at the way the English sounds are described and what devices are designed in order to explain them as realistically and pragmatically as possible. It is this material that, lacking a defined grammaticographic tradition as it does, proves to be particularly inventive and definitely less constrained than other sections of the manuals directly deriving from the previous Anglo-French tradition (cf. § 1.2). Such data are therefore precious to illustrate the stereotypes and opinions on English that were circulating in teaching circles at that time and can furthermore provide useful information on the authors' linguistic approach to tackle such a novel subject.

2.1.2.1. Difficulty and variability

In the entire corpus, the difficulty of the English language at large and of its pronunciation in particular is constantly emphasised, the latter being often associated to such adjectives as DIFFICULT, VARIABLE, INCONSTANT. Hence, Baretti (1760) describes English as "questa veramente difficile lingua", a concept stressed by Baselli (1795) with the superlative "difficilissima" and reiterated by Barker (1766) with regard to sounds, "difficoltà della pronunzia". Again, Altieri (1728) hints at the variable nature of English phonetics, indirectly noting that there are more vowels than those in the Italian sound system, and finally suggesting practising the language on site; this notwithstanding, he then offers the reader some useful rules: "O è una vocale tanto variabile nella lingua Inglese, che mi pare impossibile per un forestiere d'imparare i diversi suoni per altro mezzo che per uso" (Altieri 1728: 299). The

unpredictable nature of English pronunciation seems to strike the authors most, especially if comparing it with Italian; they realise that no stable rule can be provided, as Baretti points out:

> perciò nessuno prenda questa indicata regola per infallibile, come neppure alcuna di quelle che ho già date qui sopra o che darò qui dietro, che regole di pronunzia Inglese assolutamente invariabili nell'opinione mia non ve n'ha neppur una (Baretti 1760:8),

a consideration that is easily generalised and attached to the language on the whole, as Barker (1766: 53) maintains by hinting at "l'incostante variazione dell'idioma inglese", or to suprasegmental phonological elements:

> la massima difficoltà si riduce a poter determinare il luogo dell'Accento, che può dirsi dipendente affatto dal costume, o piuttosto dall'incostanza dell'Idioma […]. Questa è una difficoltà comune a tutte le Lingue che s'ignorano (Baselli 1795: xi).

Many are the causes alleged for such peculiar variation within the language, from an inner linguistic feature to usage, and even to historical causes, as Dalmazzoni (1788: 35) argues: "formata, accresciuta, e abbellita da moltissime altre Lingue; e che in conseguenza da ciascheduna di esse porta i principj di continue variazioni, e irregolarità nella sua pronuncia". In spite of this, the authors / teachers encourage the hypothetical student not to give up, using a frequent literary topos, that of mountain climbing to reach the aspired peak, which is based on a didactic method that resources to images and metaphors. This is distinctive of Baretti, who often refers to his firsthand experience as a former student of English and as an Italian that has been in contact with the English culture and language for a long time (cf. Vicentini 2006: 193), as is shown by the following example: "deh confortiti, e non si lasci ributtare dall'aspetto di poche rupi e balze, e non faccia tanta vergogna al coraggio Italiano, uso a vincere e negli antichi e ne' moderni tempi i più ostinati ostacoli" (Baretti 1760: 31).

2.1.2.2. Discrepancy between spelling and pronunciation

The unreliable correspondence between the written and the spoken language is certainly a peculiar, distinguishing feature of the English language, and also represents a serious problem for foreign students of English, who must cope with it during their school career. This is a proper topos that variously appears in all the six grammars under

scrutiny here and is used a lot, especially by Baretti (1760: 4), who states that "quantunque nel leggere l'alfabeto gl'Inglesi dieno a ciascuna lettera quel suono da me quasi espresso nel margine d'esso, pure nel discorso quasi ogni lettera ha altri suoni", thus emphasising how complicated a task it is to teach English pronunciation to an Italian: "difficile impresa sarebbe quella di far capire colla penna a un Italiano la differenza che ha l'o Inglese quando accompagnato colla w termina sillaba o monosillabo o parola, e forma come un dittongo" (Baretti 1760: 13). This is strictly interconnected with the aforementioned idea of difficulty associated to the English language in general, and to the student's effort to learn it. Metaphors describing this problem abound, once again especially in Baretti (1760), where the presence of a letter corresponding to two different sounds, for example, is referred to as a "labyrinth": "questo negozio del g in inglese è un LABIRINTO, di cui l'uso solo e la viva voce ne può apprendere le intricate vie" (Baretti 1760: 21); "vediamo tutta via se gli è possibile trovar filo che ci conduca in questo LABIRINTO" (Baretti 1760: 20). Yet again, obstacles to be overcome are identified as steep uphills to start, "una MONTAGNA SCABRA E DI MALAGEVOLISSIMA SALITA, senza ascender la quale non sia possibile di entrare nel glorioso tempio della lingua Britannica […]" (Baretti 1760: 31), or as venturing out to sea: "poi l'imparare questa veramente difficile lingua non è come un'AVVENTURARSI SULL'INCOGNITO OCEANO e andare in cerca d'un nuovo mondo con poco consiglio e senza guida" (Baretti 1760: 31).

2.1.2.3. Swiftness

Another image related to English pronunciation is that of swiftness, which recurs many times and is often described by contrast with the Italian sound system. In actual fact, some of the authors identify the consequences of the Middle English stress shift to the beginning of the word, which caused a phonological erosion – that is case suffixes loss, the dropping of word endings in general and of some consonants as well as vowel weakening to /ə/ in unstressed syllables[9] – but ascribe it to swift pronunciation, and suppose that this derives from the presence of lots of monosyllabic words. In that regard, Baselli upholds (1795: 254):

[9] All historical linguistics references have been drawn on Baugh, Cable (2001) and Fennell (2001).

> Le primitive parole inglesi, essendo monosillabe, eccettuatene poche bisillabe, devono per natura condurre ad una pronunzia rapida, che vuolsi però comunicare anche a le derivative, composte, e adottate. Quindi nascono le cinque leggi che seguono: I. allontanamento dell'accento dall'ultima sillaba: fatta la posa sulle prime sillabe, le ultime sortono rapide dalla bocca […]. V. Per accelerare la pronuncia si tacciono alcune lettere, che però diconsi mute, e sono da me contrassegnate con un punto messovi accanto e in alto […].

Also the variabilty of vowels is attributed to swift pronunciation, "che fa sì che le vocali non si pronunzino secondo le Regole generali, dopo la sillaba accentata" (Barker 1766: 63).

2.1.3 Morphosyntax: simplicity and difficulty

Whereas the most recurrent topoi on pronunciation refer to the idea of difficulty, those emerging from the sections devoted to morphology and syntax are mostly based on simplicity in general, which depends on the fact that English was already lacking many morphological inflections at that time, especially as far as case declensions are concerned. Thus, several are the observations regarding the simplicity of English grammar, as in Dalmazzoni (1788: 82): "la grammatica in nessuna altra lingua è così facile, come nell'inglese", which are associated, in particular, to the concept of invariability – exactly the opposite as with pronunciation – of the parts of speech. The presence of only one article, invariable gender and adjectives are examples of the simplicity of English as opposed to Italian, as Pleunus (1701: 30) makes clear:

> la lingua inglese adopera un Articolo solo, il quale serve a tutti i Nomi masculini,e feminini, principino da vocale, o da consonante, & è singolare, e plurale, il che rende la lingua Inglese la più facile assai dell'Italiana, poiché la conoscenza dei Generi dà poco fastidio in Inglese: tanto più che gli adiettivi non si mutano mai, come si vedrà a suo luogo,

and further repeats when referring to the invariability of verbs:

> parlando o scrivendo in italiano non adoperiamo le persone […] ma in Inglese bisogna di necessità servirsi di I, thou, he […] altrimenti non potremmo essere intesi perché li verbi inglesi non si mutano nelle loro persone, come gl'Italiani. Il che rende la lingua inglese facile assai (Pleunus 1701: 54).

What strikes most is that the authors' descriptions underline a de facto application of the surface Latin grammatical structure, an inflected language par excellence, to the treatment of English, which had already

taken on the traits typical of isolating languages in the eighteenth century. Even when the compilers seem to realise this (cf. e.g. "le relatività de' nomi alle parole che precedono o che seguono, nella lingua Inglese non sono espresse da casi o cambiamenti di terminazioni, come in Latino; ma da articoli o preposizioni, come in Italiano", Baretti 1760: 35), the weight of a century-long consolidated tradition does not allow them to tackle the subject freely, as the following example, suitably shows: "Nom. The King, il Re. Gen. Of the King, del Re. Dat. To the King, al Re […]" (Baretti 1760: 314), where the noun is declined according to cases, though being accompanied with prepositions. Such recurrent approach reveals the presence of a traditional grammar model that will constrain the grammarians' interpretations and descriptions until the late nineteenth century.

Turning now to the verb system, the grammaticographers express how hard it is to find and fix infallible rules, by employing, this time, images associated to difficulty. Thus, in his treatment of the SHALL/WILL usage for example, Baretti artlessly affirms that "in otto anni di studio ostinatissimo di questa lingua, non ho potuto trovare una regola infallibile; sebbene l'abbia richiesta a quanti letterati mi sono venuti in mente" (1760: 90). In the whole text, he describes the English verb system by using numerous puns and jokes, as if he were playing with his readers. This, on the one hand, derives from a didactic method aiming to convey his learners salient information most vividly, while, on the other, is used as a strategic device to treat a thorny, sometimes repetitive subject:

> Imparerai come hanno fatto tanti e tanti tutte queste variazioni stravaganti di preteriti; e che sì che, se hai ingegno, le trovi da per te in pochi mesi? Provati da bravo, e vedrai che io sono profeta egualmente che grammatico (Baretti 1760: 93);

> Molte delle nostre donne mi scambierebbero per mago se io andassi dir loro che to take, to wake, to forsake […] fanno al preterito took, woke, forsook […] (Baretti 1760: 93).

2.2 Ideology and the contemporary linguistic debate

Finally, it must be pointed out how echoes of the contemporary linguistic debate unravel through some of the texts analysed. This testifies to how ideas and ideologies on language were spreading all over Europe at that time and in part confirms that "grammars served as an important battlefield where social and cultural issues were contested"

(Mitchell 2001: 2). Baretti (1760) engages in passionate polemics by simulating imaginary disputes on typically seventeenth-century linguistic topics such as spelling innovation:

> E qui esorto i mie Paesani volenterosi di studiare l'Inglese a non badare a certi moderni Innovatori che vorrebbero si scrivesse favor, honor, labor, e altre tali latinesche voci, in vece di favour, honour, labour, come scrissero e scrivono tutti i loro predecessori e contemporanei che ebbero e hanno orecchio fine. In tutti i paesi vi sono di questi sputacujussi che cercano di far figura con qualche novità nell'ortografia, cosa non meno facile a trovarsi che insulsa quando è trovata. (Baretti 1760: 14)[10],

the acceptance of borrowings from donating languages, the presentation of excessively pedantic etymologies and the concept of the genius of language[11]. Furthermore, he strongly attacks Scottish writers:

> Molti scrittori moderni, e se non mi ingannano le congetture, seguaci della setta presbiteriana, hanno da poco in quà incominciato a perseguitare certi adjettivi venuti loro da Roma […] (Baretti 1760: 18).

However, he does not limit himself to the English linguistic debate, but refers also to the Italian one, especially when dealing with the problem of bad translations[12] and that of the presence and status of

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[10] Besides showing Baretti's well-known conservative attitude as far as spelling reforms are concerned (see Chandra 1986, Hardy 1979), both quotations are the more interesting as they reveal a 'pre-Webster anti-Websterian sentiment', a position that can already be seen in Johnson's anti-Americanism and defence of Britishness, his *Dictionary* being a manifesto of it: on this issues see Roberts (1977) and Wechselblatt (1996).

[11] "Alcuni Inglesi scrivono *ae* in certe poche parole derivate dal Greco o dal Latino […]; i loro più giudiziosi scrittori però non adottano tale ortografia, come contraria alla natura della loro lingua" (Baretti 1760: 5-6).

[12] "Di questi pronomi composti ve n'hanno alcuni che gl'Inglesi cominciano a lasciar andar in disuso, come *hitherto*, *whereto*, e molt'altri, cosa che pare a me non dovrebbono fare, perché, oltre allo essere analoghi, sono molto proprie comodi; ma i loro tristi traduttori dal Francese, egualmente che que' tanti maledetti nostri che tuttodì svergognano le stampe veneziane specialmente, vanno allontanandosi dal vero genio del loro idioma, ed essendo letti con avidità dagl'ignoranti, che in tutti i paesi sono sempre i più numerosi, i loro vocabolacci e le loro frasacce forestierate si diffondono poi nella conversazione e da quella passano nelle scritture anche de' giudiziosi, che sono sforzati a adottare que' modi impropri per trovar reggitori, e così le lingue si corrompono a poco a poco, e diventano quasi dialetti d'altre lingue invece

languages/dialects in Italy, which indirectly emerges from his several observations on the topic:

> I Piemontesi, i Genovesi, i Lombardi, ed i Furlani hanno questo suono, e pronunciano la loro vocale u come i dittonghi Inglesi eu e ew, ma i Toscani e gli altri abitanti delle parti orientali e meridionali d'Italia non conoscono tal suono (Baretti 1760: 8-9).

Also Baselli (1795) seems well-informed of the novel pedagogical and didactic ideas that were circulating at the end of the century especially with regard to analytical vs. synthetic learning methodologies[13]. The author overtly manifests his criticism against the traditional glottodidactic methods and compilation of pedagogical grammars for foreigners[14] and puts forth new approaches to be assessed through the practice with students. His participation in the general fin-de-siècle desire of renewal within the field of pedagogy reveals a diverse cultural climate, which will further and more amply develop during the nineteenth century[15].

Finally, in Barker (1766) no particular reference to the coeval linguistic debate appears, but ample allusions to the history of English politics, literature and culture, which show the author was well conversant with the ideas and thoughts that were emerging and spreading in England in that period.

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di conservare l'indole loro natia; ma così va'l mondo, non c'è rimedio" (Baretti 1760: 46).

[13] Cf. Wilkins (1976: 222), quoted in Howatt (1984: 153).

[14] "Il voler porre per base de' nostri primi studi idee universali ed astratte, onde condurci alle particolari e concrete, ricerca in noi del genio, ed una decisa volontà di sostenere la più improba fatica. Ma questo è un metodo da conciliarsi pochi seguaci, un metodo riprovato dalla Natura […], un metodo finalmente, che veggiamo tutto dì smentito nelle nostre scuole riguardo all'intento. In una parola il metodo sintetico serve mirabilmente a formare un corpo di dottrine per conservarle, ma non è certamente il migliore per comunicarle. Il fanciullo non pensa ad istruirsi, molto meno a tormentarsi; vuol appagare la sua curiosità, vuol giocare; giocando distrugge, ed esamina, cioè analizza, ed analizzando s'istruisce. Convien offrirgli il frutto, lasciar che lo palpi, lo malmeni, lo morda, lo mangi, e poi dirgli quest'era un pomo […]. Ecco le ragioni, che devono muovere gl'Istitutori della gioventù a preferire l'Analisi alla Sintesi, onde facilitare ed accelerare l'istruzione de' loro Allievi" (Baselli 1795: iii-iv).

[15] This is diffusely talked over in Howatt (1984: 130): "throughout the century there were individuals with new ideas on how languages could be taught more efficiently and easily".

3. Conclusions

Apart from a few exceptions, it must be admitted that these early Italian grammars of the English language can hardly bring innovative or original contributions to grammatical theory in general. It is only fair to say that the authors mentioned above just wanted to meet practical needs, often by reworking or even copying previous grammaticographic material; besides, most of them lacked any specific professional qualifications for their job and were very probably compelled to teach English and publish their texts only in order to earn a living.

However, the investigation has revealed that, through the pages, interesting descriptions of and opinions on the English language and culture untangle, which are important to fully reconstruct the grammaticographic tradition of English in eighteenth-century Italy and, in an even larger perspective, to provide new insights into Anglo-Italian relations in a crucial moment.

In particular, the analysis has unveiled problems that are still valid when English language teaching to Italians is at stake (though they are obviously dealt with from a different perspective nowadays), such as the discrepancy between spelling and pronunciation and the presence of a verb system based on regular-irregular categories deriving from the Anglosaxon strong-weak paradigms. Still topical are the opinions on English as a language full of harsh sounds such as the interdental fricatives /T/ and /Δ/ or the indistinct, central vowel /↔/, as described by Baretti (1760: 10) in the following example:

> di tal suono io non posso dar idea con parole; dirò solo che è vocale non suscettibile punto di musica, e che se la voce d'un cantante vi si fermasse un momento sopra farebbe ridere ogni Italiano e fors'anche gl'Inglesi medesimi.

All this is carried out by contrast with the Italian language, then famous and celebrated all over Europe for its melodiousness and for its intrinsic correspondence between spelling and pronunciation, regarded as a refined language suitable for elegant conversation and music (cf. Pizzolli 2004) [16].

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[16] Interestingly, whereas opinions on the English language by the Italian authors considered here mainly focus on its difficulty, eighteenth-century English grammarians and grammaticographers described English as easy, efficient and economic, cf. Lowth (1760: iii): "the English Language is perhaps of all the present

Turning to morphology, the cliché of grammar simplicity results from the comparison with Latin, which exerts all its influence even when dealing with such a different language typology. It must be considered that using the Latin classification of the parts of speech was meant to meet the readers' expectations, who were interested in learning a foreign language, and were in fact used to Latin handbooks, and therefore to Latin grammar rules. If on the one hand this shows that the grammars to teach foreigners a language were definitely a stereotyped genre, it also highlights how the description of the English grammatical structures was slowly but gradually enfranchising itself from the classical grammar models. This tendency clearly emerges from the treatment of pronunciation, a discipline still in its infancy at the time and, as such, open to glottodidactic experimentation[17].

Finally, although traces of the contemporary linguistic debate emerge only in a few grammars (i.e. Baretti 1760 and Baselli 1795), which confirms their effective disinterest for theoretical or terminological issues – and this is the reason why they inherited and used a somewhat rigid scheme for the treatment of grammatical phenomena – one can highlight that the authors' homage to England and to its politics, economy, scientific progress and language not only was strategically devised to promote and sell their books, but also undoubtedly testifies that these "textbooks long since forgotten, but at one time widely used, [are] witness[es] to the growing interest in all things concerning England in Italy" (Frank 1983: 29).

European languages by much the most simple in its form and construction". The reason behind it lies in the fact that the authors had to promote their language to contrast the past predominance of Latin especially in a period when the standardisation process of English was under way (cf. Vicentini 2003).

[17] Suffices it to mention, one for all, the treatment of pronunciation by Baretti (1760): his phonetic descriptions are mostly made up of metaphors, similes, personifications and other figures of speech, or even proverbs and idiomatic sentences, by means of which he can convey to his learners salient information most vividly, e.g. "Y. Questa lettera è appunto come il Pipistrello ch'or ha forma di Topo ed or d'Uccello; voglio dire che quando segue consonante y è vocale, e quando segue vocale y è consonante" (Baretti 1760: 30).

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